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Einer Für Alle, Alle Für Einen—

One For All, All For One

Reviewed by Stephen P. Halbrook

*The front cover of *Einer Für Alle* is a print of the facilities for the Eidgenössische Schützenfest (Federal Shooting Festival) in Lausanne in 1876. (© Verlag Merker Effingerhof.)*

Luginbühl, Hans, ed., *Einer Für Alle, Alle Für Einen. Festschrift Zum Zweihundertjährigen Jubiläum Des Schweizer Schiesssportverbandes SSV* (Effingerhof, Schweiz: Verlag Merker, 2022), CHF 69.00, hardcover, 860 pages, 978-3-85648-161-2.

In English, this title is translated as *One For All, All For One*. A *Commemorative for the Bicentenary of the Swiss Shooting Association SSV*. This tome does much more than celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of Switzerland's marksmanship society. Given the central role of the SSV in the political, military, and social life of the country, this work is also an interactive history, indeed a reference work, for those same years. This review pinpoints some of the highlights of the volume.

The book has a forward by *Bundsrätin* (Federal Councillor) Viola Amherd, who heads the Federal Department of Defense, Civil Protection and Sport. Six distinguished historians contribute to the tome, the most prolific is Jürg Stüssi-Lauterburg, an old friend and colleague of this author. Regula Berger, who until 2022 headed the Schützen Museum in Bern which some readers may have visited, is another contributor. The work is well documented with countless original sources.

The outstanding Swiss record in international shooting competitions from 1897 onward is detailed in chapter 1. Chapters 2 through 9 describe the birth and development of the SSV shooting Organization from 1824 through 2021, each chapter devoted to specific periods of the growth of the Swiss Confederation. The roots of the rifle clubs go much further back, for instance that for Lucerne to the year 1354 and that for Geneva to 1474. But after centuries of protecting her independence by defeating some of the great armies of Europe, Switzerland was conquered by Napoleon in 1798 and did not regain her full independence until recognized as such by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. As patriotic feelings grew along with the need to establish a true armed neutrality, in 1822 Aarau rifle champion Carl Ludwig Schmid-Guiot initiated the concept of a Confederation-wide shooting association.

Chapter 2 covers the period 1824, when the association was actually launched, through 1849, in the aftermath of the Sonderbund War. From the beginning, the Schützenverein was tied into the military organization. The officers of the cantonal armed forces held a meeting in Langenthal that helped spark its growth in an organized manner (visit the Hotel Bären in that town today and see a magnificent mural in the hall where they met). Promotion of rifle shooting country-wide enhanced a militia force of all able-bodied men. The slogan “one for all, all for one,” originated at the Lausanne Federal Free Shooting Championships in 1836.

The development of the shooting societies in the context of the growth of the Federal Republic during 1850-1874 is detailed in Chapter 3. Mutual participation in shooting matches help to heal divisions between the Catholic and Protestant cantons following the Sonderbund War, which unified the country while being threatened by the European governments that repressed the 1848 revolutions. Volunteer sharpshooters were organized who could defend the Confederation at a moment’s notice. A standard caliber for rifles was adopted in 1850 for marksmen who were part of the organized militia forces. The year 1872

saw the founding of the country-wide *Feldschiessen*, which was then and remains today the largest shooting festival in the world.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century through just before World War I is covered in Chapter 4. The bond between the citizen and militia service was cemented by the Constitution of 1874, under which every Swiss man had the obligation to perform military service and would be given his arms without charge. Regulations required the arms to be kept at home to facilitate instant mobilization. Every soldier was required to shoot a certain minimum score in the annual *Obligatorische* (obligatory shooting). The SSV worked hand-in-hand with the military department to promote marksmanship skills. When the German Kaiser visited to observe Swiss military maneuvers in 1912, an image of the Kaiser with a Swiss soldier entitled “in the land of the best shooters” went viral with the following dialogue:

– *Also ihr seid 100000 solche Schützen; wenn nun aber
200000 Preußen kämen?*

– *Dä schüsset mer grad no ä mol, Mayestät!*

– You are 100,000 fine shooters, just like you. What if I send
in 200,000 Prussians?

– Then we will shoot twice, Your Majesty!

Fortunately, the Swiss managed to avoid the Great War through their armed neutrality, but the next period—1914 to 1939, the subject of Chapter 5—brought her up to the brink of the next war. Led by General Ulrich Wille in World War I, the Swiss militia army was mobilized to protect the borders and to prepare for attack. The SSV continued to hold matches and functioned essentially as a reserve militia. The war over, marksmanship blossomed as the one hundredth anniversary of the SSV was celebrated in 1924 with the unveiling of the *Aarauer Schützendenkmal* (Shooting Monument in Aarau, which can be seen today). When the Nazis came to power in Germany in



The Aarauer Schützendenkmal (Shooting Monument) in Aarau, built in 1924 on the centennial of the first Federal Schützenfest, showing one shooter with a percussion rifle shaking hands with another with a Schmidt-Rubens 1911 bolt action rifle. (Courtesy of the author.)

1933, Federal Councillor Rudolf Minger, head of the military department and a strong supporter of the SSV, facilitated measures to protect the country from the German threat. The *Eidgenössische Schützenfest* in 1939 in Luzern would be the last of the great shooting festivals for the duration of the war. When Hitler launched World War II, Henri Guisan became head of the Swiss army, whose armed citizens would be a strong dissuasive force against invasion.

“Und Steht Der Teufel Selbst Vor’m Haus, Hier Beisst Er Einen Zahn Sich Aus” (“Should the devil himself stand in front of our house, he must withdraw with the loss of a tooth”—an old saying meaning that, if Satan threatens, he would lose a tooth if he attempts to crack open the fortress). The title of Chapter 6, that message was posted in a sign at the Fortress Furggels, the largest underground fortress built in Switzerland during World War II, underneath the

village of St. Margrethenberg. From the fall of France in 1940 to the end of the war in 1945, the *Aktivdienst* (active service) generation held fast against planned Nazi invasions from the north, east, and west, and Fascist invasion from the south. In addition to the troops mobilized at the borders and in the Alpine Réduit, the SSV-trained *Ortswehren* (local defense), consisting of 100,000 old men and boys, guarded against saboteurs and parachutists and formed a cadre of armed resistance. This was not a time for matches—most men were on duty, and ammunition was in short supply—but a time for being on constant alert against aggression. While completely encircled by the Axis, the Swiss held firm. Winston Churchill said it best near the end of the war: “Of all the neutrals, Switzerland has the greatest right to distinction.”

The period of the Cold War, 1946-1970, is the subject of Chapter 7. In 1946, over 460,000 competitors shot in the rifle matches. Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe continued the serious and civic purposes of the SSV shooting programs. These years saw an increase in participation of women in shooting. As throughout the book, presidents of the SSV and their contributions are described.

SSV membership in 1971 amounted to 500,000, but that number fell to 200,000 by 1999, as noted in Chapter 8. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union greatly eased tensions to the extent that required military service also fell in this period. Symbolic of the times was the initiative brought by the Group for a Switzerland Without an Army, which was voted down in 1993. The *Eidgenössische Schützenfest* in Thun in 1995 fielded 72,241 participants (yours truly being one). The world was changing.

“The shooting tradition embodies one of the basic values of our country,” according to *Bundesrat* Ueli Maurer, a member of the Federal Council, where he served as President twice and oversaw the military department. His tenure is described in Chapter 9, which covers the years 2000-2021. The book details the SSV’s leadership, including the lengthy tenure of Peter Schmid, brother of the former Federal



Young shooters march in the parade of the Eidgenössische Schützenfest in Aarau, July 4, 2010. (Courtesy of the author.)

President Samuel Schmid (both of whom I have had the pleasure of meeting). In 2011, the Swiss rejected the *Waffendiktat* initiative that would have banned soldiers from keeping their military weapons at home, but in 2019 voted in favor of a Schengen-induced referendum that imposed EU restrictions on firearm ownership. While the Covid pandemic caused the cancellation of the Federal Shooting Festival in Lucerne in 2020, it was held the following year. Life has returned to normal, in the shooting world as elsewhere.

While the entire book is well illustrated, Chapter 10—on the Schützen Museum in Bern—is lavish. After a print of the Federal Shoot in Bern in 1885—the year when the concept of the museum originated—the reader is treated to color photographs of trophies, medals, paintings, historic posters, and glass art. The stairway walls are filled with scores of small arms, showing the historical development from crossbows and matchlocks to flintlocks and modern cartridge rifles.



The Schützen Museum building in Bern features an enormous painting of soldiers, citizens, and youngsters with rifles and the national flag. (© Swiss Shooting Museum Berne.)

The great hall upstairs houses the collection. (My only regret is that the two large paintings of bears enjoying a shooting festival is not included.) The museum's building, completed in 1939, is located behind the Bernese Historical Museum, and its outer facade features an enormous painting of soldiers, citizens, and youngsters with rifles and the national flag.

The "Haus der Schützen" is a beautiful mansion owned by a foundation with that name located at Lidostrasse 6 on the Lake of Lucerne. Built in 1918, it was acquired by the foundation in 1960. It hosts SSV functions and houses administrative offices. Its history, which unfortunately has included periodic flooding from the lake, is described in Chapter 11.

While ordnance weapons are usually distinguished from precision weapons, in Switzerland the two were combined so that the soldier and the citizen would shoot the most accurate arms. The arms issued to the militiaman are the same predominantly used in the shooting sports. Chapter 12 traces the evolution of Swiss arms from 1824 to today. Cantonal arms gave way to standardized federal arms in 1847 and there-

after. When first issued in 1869, the Swiss Vetterli rifle was the most modern military design in the world—it held twelve metallic cartridges in its tubular magazine at a time when most armies still used single-shot rifles requiring a manual reload after each shot. The 1889/96 and 1911 Schmidt-Ruben bolt-action rifles came next, using the 7.5 mm cartridge with smokeless powder. That was replaced by the Karabiner 1931, which was issued until 1958. The age of the *Sturmgewehr* (assault rifle) arrived with the heavy Model 1957 and then the lighter Model 1990, today’s service rifle. These last three models are in wide use in competitions today, along with the SIG 210 pistol, the most accurate 9 mm pistol in the world.

The book ends with a brief Chapter 13 on the study of marksmanship in the academic world. Students formed groups like the *Schützenverein Schweizerischer Polytechniker* in Zurich in 1871 and



The author of this book review with former Federal President Ueli Maurer, at the 2015 remembrance of General Henri Guisan’s historic 1940 meeting with the Swiss officers at the Rütli. (Courtesy of the author.)

elsewhere, largely in the nineteenth century. They were inspired in part by movements throughout Europe against the old order and in favor of republican ideals.

Einer Für Alle is a reference work on the history of the Swiss shooting culture in the past two centuries. It is anything but a quick read. Those who venture may find of mosts interest to be the chapters tied to particularly important periods of Swiss history, such as Chapter 2, covering the beginning of the Swiss republic through the Sonderbund war; Chapter 6, on how Switzerland's armed neutrality dissuaded Nazi invasion; or Chapter 10, with its beautiful illustrations from the Schützen Museum in Bern.

As the *Schweizer Schiesssportverbandes* enters its third century under the leadership of its current president, Luca Filippini, it will surely face dramatic challenges as elements of popular culture discourage patriotism and marksmanship, EU diktats demand civilian disarmament, and terrorism and unprovoked aggression threaten peace and freedom.

~ Stephen P. Halbrook, Attorney at Law, is author of
Target Switzerland and The Swiss and the Nazis.
See <https://stephenhalbrook.com/>.